

Article

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Cahiers de géographie du Québec, vol. 3, n° 6, 1959, p. 123-130.

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URI: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/020171ar>

DOI: 10.7202/020171ar

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GEOGRAPHERS IN THE CIVIL SERVICES OF THE FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS OF CANADA

by

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Geography in the general sense is old in official circles in Canada. In the xviith century, men like Champlain were officially regarded as geographical advisers to the administration of the day and as the civil services became more formalized, geographers were appointed within them. Most of them were without any formal training in geography. University-trained geographers on the other hand are comparative new-comers to government service in Canada. Before World War II, there were virtually no professionally trained geographers in such service, certainly not employed on a full-time basis, but they have been increasing in numbers during the past 18 or 19 years, particularly since 1947, and now total about 90.

The Government of Québec was the first to use professional geographers, when in the late 1930's, geographers from the *Université de Montréal* were employed on a part-time or seasonal basis to assist with assembling detailed information to each county in Québec which was used as a basis for the formulation of government policy.¹ The use of geographers by the Federal Government began in 1943 and by the Government of Ontario soon after that. Saskatchewan and British Columbia followed in 1947, Alberta in 1950, New Brunswick in 1954 and Newfoundland in 1955. All the geographers were used on a part-time or seasonal basis at first but these soon developed into full-time positions with the exception of New Brunswick and Newfoundland. Similar developments have been taking place in the field of municipal government dating from 1948 when a full-time geographer was appointed to the London (Ontario) and Suburban Planning Board.

But although geographers are found at all levels of government and are all generally employed to advance and maintain good government, the precise way in which they are used varies considerably. But despite the wide variety of work performed, it appears to fall into three broad categories. These are, however, by no means mutually exclusive. There is no doubt, for example, that some government geographers are engaged in « basic » or primary research and that others are solely concerned with administration. There is a third group whose work is a mixture of both, perhaps best described as « applied » research. Within the Federal Government the distinction is tacitly recognized in that only

* This paper is published with permission of the Deputy Minister, Dept. of Mines and Technical Surveys, Ottawa.

¹ ROBINSON, J. L., *The development and status of geography in universities and government in Canada*, in *Yearbook of the Ass. of Pac. Coast Geogs.*, 13, 1951, p. 11.

those carrying out basic geographical research are classified by the Civil Service Commission as « geographers ». The others are classified variously as « technical officers », « research officers », « foreign service officers », etc. The Saskatchewan Civil Service has also established the classification of « geographer » but its application is rare. In the other provinces, the classification « geographer » is not used. Graduates in geography are classified as planners, assistant planners, statisticians, principal clerks, conservationists, etc.

BASIC RESEARCH

The Federal Government

There is only one government geographical research centre in Canada and that is the Geographical Branch of the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys. As far as the Federal Government is concerned, this is intentional as it was considered in 1949 that a single geographical research centre would be more efficient and less expensive than similar groups of a few research geographers dispersed among several different departments of government.

In establishing the Geographical Branch as a « focus of things geographical »² much as the Geological Survey of Canada is a « focus of things geological », the Federal Government had examples from « the mother countries » of the United Kingdom and France as well as the experience of Brazil — another federal state, and such governments as those of Japan and Indonesia. Thus, the purpose of the Branch are « to collect, organize, and make readily available for the use of all branches of the (Federal) Government geographical data about Canada and foreign areas of importance to Canada and to prepare studies on specific aspects of the geography of Canada for the use of those engaged in government, defence, business and scientific research. »³ As a result, it has established the supporting units required for geographical research. It has the largest map library in Canada (over 115,000 sheets), a 17,000 volume book and atlas library, draughting and reproduction facilities and a ground photograph collection. Although its present personnel establishment is much smaller than that for the government research centres for geology, archæology, botany, physics, chemistry and the like, it totals some 92 persons of which 22 are full-time professional geographers, 26 are part-time geographers and 13 are students in geography. The part-time staff and the students are employed mainly during the summer, often to assist with field work.

The government of Québec

Since the establishment of the Geographical Branch, one province has emulated the action of the Federal Government, namely, the Province of Québec.

² ROSE, John Kerr, *Geography in practice in the Federal Government* Washington, in *Geography in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Griffith Taylor, London, Methuen, 1957, p. 586.

³ NICHOLSON, N.L., *The Geographical Branch, 1947-1957*, in *The Canadian Geographer*, 10, 1957, pp. 61-88.

As an outgrowth of the early mentioned above, a provincial Geographical Service was established in the provincial Department of Industry and Commerce under the powers given to it to take whatever action is necessary to aid in the development of industry and commerce.⁴ The Director of the Service is, at the same time, Director of l'*Institut de géographie* at l'*Université de Montréal*. At the moment, in addition to the Director, the Geographical Service of the Province of Québec has four geographers on its staff. Because of the department in which it is situated, it is primarily concerned with economic geography. It has already one publication to its credit and is presently working on an *Economic Atlas of the Province of Québec* and a series of surveys to be published on each of the 10 economic regions of the Province.

British Columbia

The Surveys and Mapping Branch of the British Columbia Department of Lands and Forests has a geographical division. But the meaning of the word « geographic » is rather different from that understood by modern geographers. The chief purpose of the division in British Columbia is to produce maps — usually on topographic scales, so that its function is cartographic rather than geographic. Nevertheless, its head is called Chief Geographer and although the present incumbent is a land surveyor, he is assisted by two graduate geographers who produce regional analyses of different parts of the Province from time to time. Some of the basic geographical research in this province is carried out in collaboration with the provincial university and business and industry as was the case with the production of the *Atlas of British Columbia*.⁵

The remaining Provinces

What might be termed « basic » geographical research in the other provinces is usually carried out in collaboration with the universities, business and industry or the Geographical Branch of the Federal Government. For example, the *Atlas of Manitoba* is being prepared under arrangements similar to those employed in British Columbia for their atlas while in Newfoundland fundamental surveys concerned with land use have been carried out by the Geographical Branch. Apart from British Columbia and Québec there are no geographical branches or divisions established in any of the provincial governments. Robinson⁶ has suggested that this is probably because provincial government departments are much smaller than federal government departments and that, therefore, the work and scope of a geographer tends to overlap several provincial departments and cannot conveniently be placed in any one unless the geographer is restricted to more or less specialist topics. His work then becomes « applied geography » rather than « basic research ».

⁴ Personal communication from Dr. P. DAGENAIS, Director, Geographical Service, Quebec Dept. of Industry and Commerce (April 24, 1958).

⁵ CHAPMAN, J. D., *The preparation of the Atlas of British Columbia*, in *The Canadian Geographer*, 10, 1957, pp. 69-71.

⁶ ROBINSON, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

APPLIED RESEARCH

There are a large number of government geographers whose work falls into this category. They are using the results of basic objective surveys and applying them to a particular problem or set of problems with which their Government is concerned at the moment.⁷ But this approach often results in the dispersal of geographers among several government units, even within the same department.

The Federal level

The geographical Branch itself is by no means confined to « basic research », as its terms of reference indicate. Frequently it is asked to carry out a specific study with a particular government purpose in mind. An example is the work it did in connection with the Causeway across the Strait of Canso in Nova Scotia.⁸ Often it carries out such studies in collaboration with other government departments, such as the team approach to the problem of relocating Aklavik⁹ or its co-operation with the Department of fisheries in surveying the most favourable locations for the concentration of mechanized fishing activities in Newfoundland.¹⁰ But often the Geographical Branch supplies basic data to geographers in other departments or agencies who apply it to their problems. This is best exemplified by the Department of National Defence which employs some ten geographers for this purpose in its Defence Research Board.¹¹ The National Research Council also employs two geographers whose job it is to apply the results of geographical research within their Division of Building Research. As a further example of the way in which applied research results in the dispersal of geographers, there are two geographers employed in the Surveys and Mapping Branch of the Department of Mines and Technical Surveys where their training is applied to cartographical problems. The number is in sharp contrast to the experience of the United States of America where some professional geographers are employed by the Federal Government in map making — almost half the total of geographers in government geography in Washington.¹²

Recently the Federal Government has appointed geographers as professors in their military colleges. Although geography has been taught during the summer at the Royal Military College at Kingston for some years, a full-time assistant professor of geography was not appointed there until 1956. Similarly,

⁷ FARLEY, A. L., *Applied geography in British Columbia*, in *The Canadian Geographer*, 4, 1954, pp. 15-20.

⁸ CAMU, Pierre, *The Strait of Canso in relation to the economy of Cape Breton Island*, in *Geographical Bulletin*, 3, 1953, pp. 51-69.

⁹ MERRILL, C. L., *Notes on the Aklavik Relocation Project*, 1954, in *The Canadian Geographer*, 7, 1956, p. 27.

¹⁰ *Annual Report for the Fiscal Year 1954-55*, Canada, Dept. of Mines and Technical Surveys, Ottawa, 1956, p. 108.

¹¹ UREN, P., *The Status of Military Geography in Canada*, in *The Canadian Geographer*, 1, 1951, pp. 11-14.

¹² ROSE, *op. cit.*, p. 573.

the full-time appointment of a geographer to the *Collège militaire de Saint-Jean* is recent.

There is a third group of geographers who are undoubtedly employed in applied research but *not* in applied geography, as their colleagues doing similar work have been drawn from a wide variety of other disciplines. There is one such geographer in the Communications Branch of the National Research Council, another in National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa and one in the Department of Finance.

The Provincial level

Because Canada is a Federal State the ultimate control of the resources within the provinces rests with the provinces themselves and it is in the general field of planning and development that geographers have been most extensively used by the provincial governments. In almost all cases, planning and geography are inextricably interwoven in the geographers' duties.

Ontario

The situation naturally varies from province to province but the Ontario Government typifies the position and, incidentally, employs the largest number of geographers — some 15 in all. Twelve are in the Department of Planning and Development, two are employed in its Conservation Branch which through its programme of « inventory and plan » on a watershed basis is essentially making a geographical survey of the rural areas of the province. On the other hand the Community Planning Branch is concerned with the nucleated settlements and employs ten geographers full-time.¹³ Two other geographers are employed in the Fisheries and Parks Divisions of the Department of Lands and Forests on similar work. More recently, the Department of Highways has engaged a senior geographer to assist in formulating a 20-year plan for highway development, in the course of which excellent research is being stimulated.

Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan has always recognized the unique services which geographers could provide¹⁴ and for its population has employed more than any other province. After several years of using seasonal geographers, the Department of Natural Resources, in 1940, hired its first full-time geographer and today the Director of Conservation in that Department is a geographer. Two others are with the Department of Municipal Affairs in its Community Planning Branch. Their primary concern is also with the planning of resource utilization

¹³ Personal communication from Mr. T. A. C. TYRRELL, Deputy Minister, Ontario Dept. of Planning and Development, May 14, 1958.

¹⁴ DAVIDSON, A. T., *Role of Geographers in Saskatchewan*, in *The Canadian Geographer*, 4 1954, pp. 33-38.

and it is gratifying to note that is viewed very broadly so as to embrace problems of human geography as well as the physical aspects of the environment.¹⁵

British Columbia

As might be expected, British Columbia is second to Ontario in the numbers of geographers it employs in applied research at a governmental level. In addition to the Department of Lands and Forests already referred to, geographers are to be found in each of the following departments — Recreation and Conservation (Park Branch) ; Mines (Trade, Commerce and Industrial Development) and Municipal Affairs.

The Municipal level

At the municipal level, geographers so far have been almost exclusively concerned with physical planning. They form part of the staffs of Planning Boards, or their equivalents, in Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, London, Toronto (two), Ottawa and Montréal. In addition, several towns and cities in Canada employ university professors of geography from time to time on a consultative basis. Occasionally, such geographers and their students are commissioned to carry out a special piece of research by a local municipality. At least one geographer is employed by an area school board to carry out research on the location of new schools within the area. Of course, in a sense, all school teachers are employees of a local government but those who teach geography are not included in this report. Also excluded from Table I are the geographers employed by Crown Companies and similar bodies such as Trans-Canada Air Lines, the Fraser River Board in British Columbia or the Ontario Hydro-Electric Commission.

ADMINISTRATION

A growing number of geographers are finding their way into government administration and it must be concluded that the discipline of a geographical training is useful in fitting people to handle almost any of the various affairs of the day. Such geographers do not carry out primary research and they hardly carry out « applied research » although opinions may differ according to one's definition of « applied research ». One way of differentiating between the groups is according to the degree to which graduation in geography is required for the work to be done. For those engaged in basic research, such formal training is essential. For those engaged in « applied geographical research » formal training in geography may or may not be required by the employing agency. But for those in administration, training in geography is *not* a prerequisite for the work which they do. Similar work may be performed by graduates

¹⁵ VALENTINE, V. F., and YOUNG, R. G., *The situation of the Metis of Northern Saskatchewan in relation to his physical and social environment*, in *The Canadian Geographer*, 4, 1954 pp. 49-56.

TABLE I

*SUMMARY OF GRADUATES IN GEOGRAPHY EMPLOYED¹ IN FEDERAL,² PROVINCIAL²
OR MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS IN CANADA*

| GOVERNMENT OR AGENCY | CATEGORY OF WORK | | | TOTALS |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
| | <i>Basic Research</i> | <i>Applied Research</i> | <i>Administration</i> | |
| TOTAL, FEDERAL GOVERNMENT | 21 | 21 | 9 | 51 |
| Civil Service Commission . . . . . | .. .. | .. .. | 2 . | 2 . |
| External Affairs . . . . . | .. .. | .. .. | 5 . | 5 . |
| Finance . . . . . | .. .. | 1 .. | . . | 1 . |
| Mines and Technical Surveys | 19 : .. | 5 : .. | . . | 24 . |
| Geographical Branch | .. 19 | .. 3 | . . | . . |
| Surveys and Mapping Branch . . . . . | .. .. | .. 2 | . . | . . |
| National Defence | 2 : .. | 12 : .. | . . | 14 . |
| Defence Colleges . . . . . | .. .. | .. 2 | . . | . . |
| Defence Research Board | .. 2 | .. 9 | . . | . . |
| Others . . . . . | .. .. | .. 1 | . . | . . |
| National Research Council . . . . . | .. .. | 3 : .. | . . | 3 . |
| Building Research . . . . . | .. .. | .. 2 | . . | . . |
| Communications Branch . . . . . | .. .. | .. 1 | . . | . . |
| Northern Affairs . . . . . | .. .. | .. .. | 2 . | 2 . |
| TOTAL, PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS | 2 .. | 26 .. | 2 . | 30 . |
| British Columbia | 2 .. | 4 .. | . . | 6 . |
| Saskatchewan . . . . . | .. .. | 3 .. | 2 . | 5 . |
| Ontario . . . . . | .. .. | 15 .. | . . | 15 . |
| Quebec . . . . . | .. .. | 4 .. | . . | 4 . |
| TOTAL, MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS . . . . . | .. .. | 9 .. | . . | 9 . |
| TOTAL, ALL GOVERNMENTS | 23 .. | 56 .. | 11 . | 90 . |

1. Exclude part-time and seasonal employees. 2. Excludes Crown Companies and similar bodies.

in one of a number of disciplines among which history, economics and public administration are the chief.

The Federal field

That there is a difference between « research geographers » and geographers in administration is exemplified by the fact that a few geographers have forsaken one for the other within the Federal Government. Two geographers, formerly with the Geographical Branch, are presently employed by the Civil Service Commission and two other former Branch members are now with the Department of External Affairs. This latter Department now has at least five foreign service officers who are graduate geographers serving in Canadian Embassies at such widely-spaced places as Rio de Janeiro, Tokyo and at headquarters in Ottawa. In a similar way, the Department of Northern Affairs has a professional geographer in the position of Administrator for the Mackenzie District of the Northwest Territories, and another in the headquarters administration of the Department.

The Provincial field

Saskatchewan is the only province which affords a comparison in provincial governments. The Department of Natural Resources not only has a geographer as its Assistant Deputy Minister but also has a geographer as its Northern Administrator.

CONCLUSION

The number of graduates in geography has increased significantly during the last decade or so. This has been accompanied by a corresponding increase in the numbers who have been entering the services of the various governments at all levels from federal to municipal.

At the same time, the precise nature of the work that such graduates are called upon to do, or choose to do, varies considerably. It is evident that training in geography is considered to be a useful discipline *per se* as many so trained are now in administrative positions not concerned with geography at all. Others, on the other hand, are essentially carrying out geographical research with a broad middle group partly concerned with administration and partly with geography.
